

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Water Please, No Ice

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Ray and I are on the wagon. He's been sober for 25 years. I quit drinking a few years later. There are a lot of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people who are clean and sober, but we're invisible, and when we come to the celebrations of our friends, we are often handed a glass of champagne for a toast. Just as it is assumed that a person is straight unless he or she says otherwise, it is assumed that people drink alcohol unless they say otherwise. We live in a world that esteems booze, and questions the normalcy of those who don't.

On cruise ships, gay people gather the first night at a publicized meeting for the "Friends of Dorothy," a reference to Dorothy Gale from the *Wizard of Oz*. She wasn't gay, but she believed in a place where dreams really do come true. Recovering alcoholics and drug addicts meet as "Friends of Bill," a reference to the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. On a straight cruise, there are a lot of gay people who have to decide which meeting to go to. It's a lot easier to decide if you're on a gay cruise, but most recovering alcoholics I know avoid gay cruises, where the captain of the ship is the designated driver.

I feel that people who don't drink make most drinking people as uncomfortable as do atheists among theists. In the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community, this can make life particularly difficult, especially if you are single. Those of us, who are married, can stay home, eat at 6:00, have our ice cream at 7:00, and go to bed early. But if you're a single person, the gay bars are the likeliest place to find other gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender people, but the only people who go to those places, you assume, are probably people who drink. Gay AA meetings become the sites for possible dating.

Recovered smokers, of which I am one, have a reputation for hating the smell of smoke. It can actually make us sick. If a former smoker watches a program such as *Mad Men*, which is set in the 1960s when everyone seemed to smoke, the lifestyle of cigarette butts and ashes is very unappealing. Today, it is a lot easier to turn down an offered cigarette than it was 50 years ago. In fact, people who smoke are often seen as a weak and sorry lot. Smoking in public places is prohibited in many cities. It's considered cool to be a former smoker. We don't make people uncomfortable.

Recovering alcoholics (we always use the "active" verb with the word "recover" to indicate the battle is never over) can be like recovered smokers. I admit that I don't much like the smell of alcohol on someone's breath, and Ray and I get angry at characters in movies and television programs who get drunk. Alcohol and drugs change a person's sense of reality, and impact the comfort of those around them, just as cigarettes do. The more the person drinks, the less attractive they become physically and emotionally.

When I'm offered a drink, I ask for water without ice. That's not a popular order in a restaurant, which counts on customers to create big bills with their orders for booze. In a friend's home,

particularly that of a new acquaintance, my request for water without ice can create moments of anxiety. "How about sparkling water, or flavored water?" they ask. "No, just tap water," I reply, "cold if you have it."

When you don't drink, you become increasingly aware of the importance of alcohol in the lives of some other people. The first thing asked at a party, is often, "Where's the bar?" Invitations to parties often say, "Drinks at 6:00. Dinner at 8:00." Wine is the customary gift to bring when invited to a person's home for dinner. When you decline the offer of an alcoholic beverage, the responses often include, "You're no fun," and "I can't drink alone."

Prohibition, the period in the United States when serving and consuming alcohol was illegal, was as stupid a solution to the problems created by over-drinking as is today's prohibition of the sale and use of marijuana. I don't want to stop others from enjoying a drink, but I refuse to feel as if my not drinking is anti-social, any more than my not smoking is anti-social, and any more than my not being straight is anti-social.

Social attitudes change. We no longer admire those who smoke cigarettes. We now understand and accept that many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. One day, I hope we come to see that drinking alcohol for more than the simple pleasure of its taste, is not healthy or appealing, nor in the best interest of the general public.